

VZCZCXRO7082
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #0430/01 0441505
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 131505Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5717
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000430

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/12/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#) [UK](#)
SUBJECT: FCO'S HOWELLS:BRITISH ELECTORATE MONITORING IRAQ
LEADERS

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. In a February 9 meeting, UK Foreign Office Minister of State Kim Howells told Ambassador Crocker that he had not gotten the sense from intense U.K. Cabinet discussions that the British were going to relinquish responsibility in Basrah. Howells was clear, however, that the U.K. electorate was closely monitoring Iraqi leaders' performance, and that if they were not able to solve Basrah's unique security challenges, it would be increasingly difficult for HMG to justify its mission in the South. Howells, who also visited the capital of the Kurdish region Erbil, noted senior Kurdish leadership's mixed willingness to compromise on key issues. Howells described himself as "very, very worried" about Iran's nuclear ambitions and added that the December National Intelligence Estimate on Iran (NIE) "floored" him. British Ambassador Christopher Prentice and FCO Iraq Chief Frank Baker suggested that the EU was ready to assume an expanded role in Iraq and mentioned that EU Foreign Policy Chief Javier Solana had already considered visiting Baghdad, but canceled because of schedule conflicts. Ambassador Prentice asked for Embassy assistance locating an IZ site for an enlarged EU mission. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) FCO Minister of State Kim Howells, British Ambassador to Iraq Christopher Prentice, FCO Iraq Chief Frank Baker, UK Embassy Political Counselor Kate Sands-Knight and Sarah Cowley, Assistant and Private Secretary to the Minister, represented HMG at the meeting. Ambassador Ryan Crocker, Political Counselor Matt Tueller, Special Assistant Ali Khedery and Political Officer James Hogan attended for the USG.

South -- A Mixed Post-PIC Assessment

13. (C) Ambassador Crocker mentioned that in recent meetings, Basrah's top law enforcement officials, Generals Mohan and Jalil had delivered uniform messages describing growing Iranian influence in their city. Crocker regretted that the generals "made no effort to propose Iraqi solutions to Iraqi problems" but admitted that the situation was difficult to gauge because the city was "denied territory." Ambassador Crocker added that Mohan had been candid about his need, under the circumstances, to deal with Jaysh al Mahdi (JAM). Ambassador Crocker underscored that in the post-PIC context, Basrah's security was an Iraqi problem, but cautioned that both the U.S. and the U.K. would have to monitor the situation closely.

14. (C) To Howells' question about police reform, Ambassador Crocker noted that several of the ten attempts on Basrah Police Chief Major General Jalil's life originated within the police department, and Ambassador Prentice added that the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior was also slowing reform by allowing some "of the people Jalil kicks out the door to come back in through the window." Ambassador Crocker said Mohan's response to Crocker's inquiries about efforts to eradicate

JAM from the port of Umm Qasr was the Arabic equivalent of "me and what army?" Ambassador Prentice suggested that Mohan and Jalil might have been putting the worst light on the security situation to leverage increased material support for their organizations and to promote Governor Wa'eli's Fadilah party. Prentice also said Mohan was slowing progress by demanding to be the sole point-of-contact between Basrah ISF and MND-SE. Ambassador Crocker maintained that while the two might have other agendas, the out-gunned and out-manned ISF also had genuine material shortfalls and faced a trying security environment in Basrah.

15. (C) Howells confirmed that the ongoing commitment of British forces to MND-SE had been the subject of intense discussions within the British government. Howells assured Ambassador Crocker that he had "not gotten the sense that the UK will relinquish responsibility" in the sector, but made a point to emphasize that security in Basrah was an Iraqi issue. Howells said he noted the "extreme reluctance of Iraqi leadership to take decisions" in this context and concluded that it was of "overarching importance" that they begin to do so. Howell cautioned that the British "electorate's attention is shifting to what Iraqi leaders are doing" and that the electorate had to be convinced Iraqi leaders were taking hard but necessary decisions to solve their own problems. Ambassador Prentice pursued this by suggesting that 2008 could be the high point of international engagement in Iraq and that if Iraqi leadership did not rise to the challenge (Prentice cited the conclusion of an SFA with the U.S. as a bellwether) that it would be "increasingly difficult to justify the engagement." Ambassador Crocker said it was tricky to determine the weight of a presence that was now focused on support, but left no doubt that British forces were necessary in post-PIC Basrah.

BAGHDAD 00000430 002 OF 003

North/140 Issues -- Barzani to Make Two-Week Trip to Baghdad

16. (C) Howells remarked that the North "looked more prosperous" but regretted he had not gotten a "clear picture of a future Kurdistan" from senior Kurdish leadership. Howells found Massud Barzani "uncompromising" on some topics (hydrocarbons legislation and constitutional implications of delays in the 140 process) but "less exercised" on others, such as KRG/Turkish engagement on PKK issues. Although Howells stressed the need for compromise (and, in a positive development, reported that both Massud and Nechirvan Barzani are planning upcoming two-week trips to Baghdad), he also noted that KRG leadership did not appear to think they had overplayed their hand. Ambassador Crocker commented that the process was at the beginning and required "strategic patience," but cautioned that all the salient issues contained "huge opportunities for setback." He regretted that while Sunni/Shi'a tensions waned, Arab/Kurdish tensions were on the rise, a trend fueling violence in Mosul. Ambassador Prentice mentioned that Vice President Hashimi had raised the same concern at an earlier meeting, and Ambassador Crocker warned that tensions could not slide much further.

17. (C) Howells said that at their meeting, SRSF Steffan de Mistura pushed for an "incremental approach" on Article 140 issues, arguing that solving clear-cut challenges would build confidence and create momentum to tackle thornier problems. Ambassador Prentice added that both de Mistura and KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani have identified five areas (Prentice did not specify if there was any overlap) where they thought they could jump-start the Article 140 process. Ambassador Crocker reminded Howells and Prentice that Article 140 also encompassed hotly disputed southern internal borders, particularly those between Anbar and Karbala.

Elections -- Better to Have Them

18. (C) Noting that "you don't make (the situation) better by not having elections," Ambassador Crocker pushed for 2008 elections, but wondered if concerns about procedural issues, particularly those of Shi'a parties over IHEC incompetence, did not mask the parties' underlying reluctance to go to the polls. Ambassador Crocker also mentioned the need to "wicker-in" elections with progress on Article 140 issues.

Strategic Framework Agreement -- Good Start, Executive Council Key

19. (C) Ambassador Crocker said that procedurally the Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA) process was off to a good start and outlined for Howells the three-level negotiating framework (Executive Council, Deputies, working-level) the GOI planned to use. (NOTE: Ambassador Crocker specified that Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammad Hamoud would lead the working-level group. END NOTE) Declaring that this agreement would be unlike any other the USG had, Ambassador Crocker said the key was to focus on the Iraqi context and find the balance between a clear definition of the authorities needed and the level of explicitness we wished to enter in the agreement. He modulated his assessment by saying that it was still an "open proposition" whether political parties and leaders were committed to a functioning Iraq and assessed that the Executive Council's (former "3 plus 1") performance during SFA negotiations would be the telling factor. Ambassador Prentice noted that the Council had not yet "broken into difficult territory" but Ambassador Crocker stressed that it was early and that the Council's approach would be incremental in any case. Ambassador Crocker observed that unexpected factors, such as council members' health, could also be an issue. Driving the point home, Howells mentioned that Prime Minister Maliki had cancelled that day's meeting, citing ill health. (Note: Maliki received a Codel just prior to the Howells meeting and showed no sign of fatigue. End Note.)

Iran

110. (C) Ambassador Crocker told Howells that we expected to hold working-level tri-lateral talks focused on Iraq's security on February 15 and asked if the UK side had any advice. Ambassador Prentice offered the services of the UK's Iran Ambassador Geoffrey Adams if we wished to convey specific points to cover during the talks. Howells admitted to being "very, very worried" about Iran's nuclear ambitions. He volunteered that the December NIE had "floored" him, and also provided the Iranians the basis for what he called their "triumphalist attitude." He gave poor marks to the

BAGHDAD 00000430 003 OF 003

International Atomic Energy Commission ("they don't know what's going on in the labs and the plants") and admitted that the EU3 3 talks "were going nowhere." Howells assessed that the major problem was "Iran's uranium enrichment program -- and you don't have to be a genius to know where that's going." But with a hint of admiration, Howells described Russia's Iran policy as "a very clever, long game."

Syria

111. (C) Howells noted that in their meeting, Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari still appeared concerned about foreign terrorists and fighters (FTF) flow from Syria into Iraq and the SARG's role in the region generally. Ambassador Crocker said, and Howells agreed, that the diminished FTF flow was partly due to SARG efforts, which, although clearly self-serving, also presented opportunities for further engagement.

Diplomatic Representation in Baghdad

¶12. (C) Ambassador Crocker told Howells that we would like to see broader EU engagement in Iraq generally and in particular EU encouragement of Arab countries to open Missions and send Ambassadors to Iraq. He added we would also welcome a visit by EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana. FCO Iraq Group Chief Frank Baker said the European Parliament had already instructed the European Commission to take a more active role in Iraq, and that recently Solana's office had approved an Iraq visit, but canceled because of schedule conflicts. Ambassador Prentice said HMG was already pressing for more robust EU engagement, but that the EU mission (which is co-located with the British Embassy in Baghdad) was statutorily too small to manage a dedicated country budget. The EU wanted a site near the U.S. NEC, but felt USG priorities pushed it aside in favor of Arab countries that were also seeking embassy sites in Baghdad's International Zone. To Ambassador Prentice's suggestion that an EU mission "would be more productive than an Arab embassy" Ambassador Crocker answered that he did not think it was an either/or question and that we would talk to EU representatives and try to accommodate their request.

CROCKER